

Amphibious Assault Lift Requirements For The Future Operational Environment

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Amphibious Assault Lift Requirements For The Future Operational
Environment

Submitted by Captain CF Crim

To

Major RM Dixon, CG 8

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Introduction

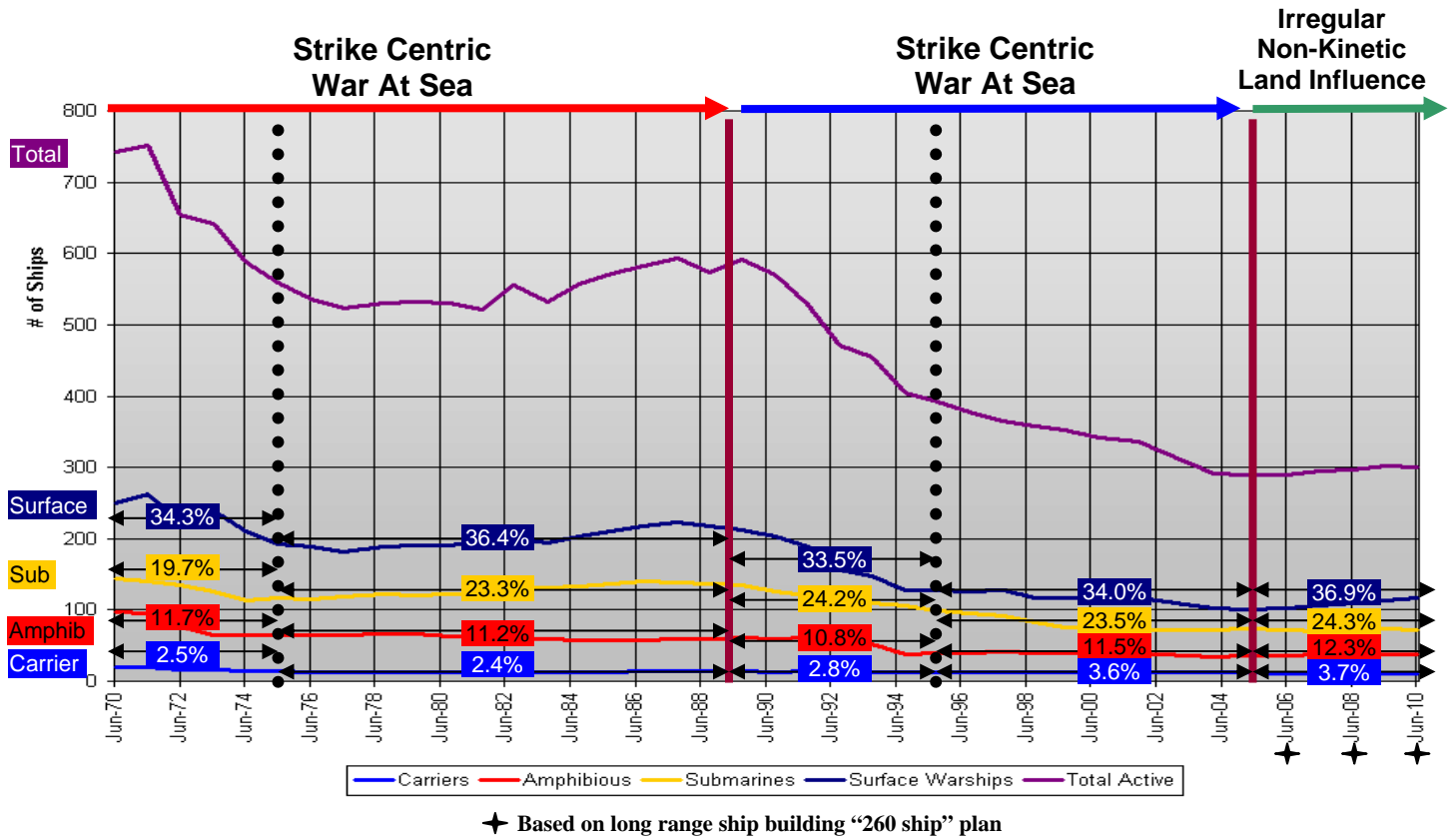
Throughout history the United States has relied on the strength and capabilities of its naval services to defend its shores, to provide freedom of navigation around the globe, to defeat enemy navies, and to project military power. In the 1930s, the Marine Corps developed the initial doctrine for conducting amphibious operations against an opposed landing. The doctrine was refined during World War II and has remained mostly unchanged since. Although doctrine has remained relatively unchanged, the strategic landscape has changed significantly. In 2002 the Department of the Navy published "Naval Power 21", which continues the evolution from the traditional war-at-sea focus to a land based effects focus.¹ The most effective method to accomplish strategic and operational objectives in the future will be through the use of sea based forces that are able to put troops ashore quickly. The Navy's amphibious ship force structure does not meet future strategic requirements.

In 1990, the Department of the Navy conducted the Integrated Amphibious Operations and USMC Air Support Requirements Study (DoN Lift II Study) in order to define the amphibious lift and

¹ Vern Clark, "Sea Power 21," Proceedings 128, no. 10 (October 2002), 10.

support requirements. The study determined the requirement for amphibious lift to be the assault echelon of three Marine Expeditionary Brigades (3.0 MEB AE). The requirement was fiscally constrained to 2.5 MEB AE. The programmatic goal for this requirement was determined to be twelve amphibious ready groups with accepted operational risk in order to balance force structure with available resources.² The study was conducted at the end of the Cold War during a significant force structure reduction and was based on the blue-water, war-at-sea focus of the "Maritime Strategy" (1986). The future operational environment has changed dramatically since the DoN Lift II study was conducted. The 3.0 MEB AE lift requirement remains valid. However, the total number of active amphibious ships declined by approximately forty percent since the early 1990's. Although the operational environment has changed since the end of the cold war in the late 1980's, the composition of the Navy's fleet of active ships has not.

² Director, Operations Division (PO), HQMC, Letter to Director, Expeditionary Warfare Division (N75), 6 November 2001.



Composition of the Naval Fleet: 1975-2010³

War-At-Sea Focus: 1975-1989

Strategic Landscape

The incidents between 1975 and 1984 in which the U.S. used military forces, 81% involved naval forces.⁴ During the Cold War the assurance of mutual nuclear destruction created a stalemate between the U.S. and the Soviet Union, which lead to an arms

³ Various sources collected while serving as an Amphibious Requirements Officer at Marine Corps Combat Development Command

⁴ John B. Hattendorf, *Newport Paper 19: The Evolution of the U.S. Navy's Maritime Strategy, 1977-1986* (Naval War College, 2004), 3.

race in order to achieve an advantage. Conventional forces became the preferred choice as a political instrument. The Soviet Navy developed into a global maritime power due to significant capability increases.

Naval Fleet Focus

The focus of the Navy during this period was based on planning capabilities and requirements on a future world war with the Soviet Union. The Navy was faced with replacing approximately half of its aging surface fleet in the early 1970s. The navy and policy makers attempted to determine the appropriate size of the Navy. In an attempt to maintain a U.S.-Soviet balance, the size of the active fleet fluctuated between 425 and 600 ships. Budget reductions following the Vietnam War and inter-service competition among Navy leadership led to the perceived lack of a comprehensive maritime strategy in the mid to late 1970s

In 1978 Admiral Thomas B. Hayward was appointed the 21st Chief of Naval Operations (CNO). Admiral Hayward continued his work of changing the Navy's strategic thinking that he started as the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet with Sea Strike Strategy. As CNO, Admiral Hayward formed the Strategic Studies Group (SSG) in order to develop free thinking and exchange of

ideas. The SSG developed a forum for the discussion of naval strategy to prevent misinterpretation and to quell parochialism among the Navy's platform sponsors and the OpNav staff. After socializing the work developed, the SSG began to consider force acquisition in strategic terms and developed the Maritime Strategy, published in *Proceedings* January 1986, which focused on global forward deterrence against the Soviet Union. The development of the document led to a favorable response from congress for a 600 ship Navy.

The Interwar War Years: 1990-2001

Strategic Landscape

In the early 1990's, there was a paradigm shift from bi-polar super powers to a more ambiguous adversary. With the end of the cold war, the Navy no longer faced a global maritime power, but one of regional conflict in the littorals. This significant change in the operational environment led to a shift in the naval strategic vision as stated in "Forward...From the Sea", "from operations on the sea toward power projection and the employment of naval forces from the sea to influence events in the littoral regions of the world--those areas adjacent to the oceans and seas that are within direct control of and vulnerable

to the striking power of sea-based forces.”⁵ The changed operational environment necessitated a greater emphasis on peacetime forward presence and response to crisis overseas.

Naval Fleet Focus

With the lack of another global maritime power and budget constraints, the Navy reduced the size of its fleet during the 1990s by about half. During the 1990's the Department of the Navy published two key documents, "...FROM THE SEA" (1992) and "FORWARD...FROM THE SEA" (1994), intended to focus the procurement strategy and future capabilities of the Navy and Marine Corps. In 1996 the Commandant of the Marine Corps published "OPERATIONAL MANEUVER FROM THE SEA, A CONCEPT FOR THE PROJECTION OF NAVAL POWER ASHORE" (OMFTS). The intent of OMFTS was to develop the ideas expressed in "...FROM THE SEA" and "FORWARD...FROM THE SEA".

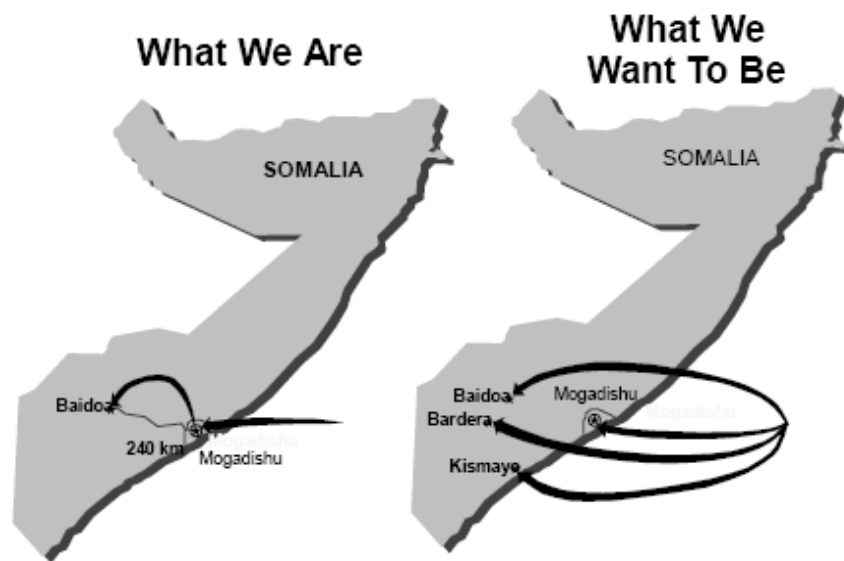
Naval Forces also contain crises through forward operations and rapid responses with flexible and sustainable sea-based forces. The seeds of conflict will continue to sprout in places where American interests are perceived as vulnerable. The art of managing crises in these areas is delicate and requires the ability to orchestrate the appropriate response and to send precisely tailored diplomatic,

⁵Department of the Navy, *Forward...From the Sea*, <<http://www.chinfo.navy.mil/navpalib/policy/fromsea/forward.txt>> (15 Dec 2005), cover letter.

economic, and military signals to influence the actions of adversaries.⁶

The basis of maneuver warfare on land is to orient on the objective in order to achieve the end result desired.

"Operational Maneuver From The Sea" expands the idea of maneuver warfare to include the sea as maneuver space. The most significant difference between traditional amphibious operations and future sea based operations is the omission of a large logistical build-up and associated operational pause ashore before continuing operations inland. In order to achieve this capability the Navy will need to purchase new ships with capabilities that are not available on current amphibious ships. This idea is depicted in the graphic below from OMFTS.



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⁶ Department of the Navy, *...From The Sea: Preparing The Naval Service For The 21st Century* (NavNews 048/92 1992), 4.

Forward Presence

The forward deployed Marine expeditionary units (special operations capable) (MEU(SOC)) and carrier strike groups (CSG) provide a deterrent to potential adversaries. As the operational environment became more focused on regional conflict in areas of U.S. interest, the requirement for a wider range of military capabilities increased. Naval capabilities were well suited to respond to the need for the full range of military operations, from humanitarian assistance / disaster relief to major theater war. Naval forces that were forward deployed around the globe were able to perform the forward presence mission to support peace and respond to crisis.

The Future Vision: 2001-Beyond

The changing landscape

Irregular warfare

Irregular warfare has become a term to encompass the entire spectrum of warfare short of major theater war by nation states. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the U.S.'s strategic focus has shifted to regional stability in the littorals, "which

⁷ United States Marine Corps, *Operational Maneuver from the Sea* (Headquarters Marine Corps, 1996), <<http://www.dtic.mil/jv2010/usmc/omfts.pdf>> (15 December 2005), 10.

contain more than half of the world's population and 75 percent of it urban areas."⁸ Terrorists and non-state actors, who are not constrained by international borders, will most likely use population centers in this region to conduct their operations. Due to the complexity of this threat, traditional military operations will not be a viable option.

Irregular warfare can not be analyzed in traditional means. Terrorist organizations and elements thereof are the result of "microclimates," a composition of local geography, history, politics, economics, family, religion, and ethnic factors.⁹ These "microclimates" can not be characterized by international borders, formal doctrine, or national direction. In order to understand and defeat terrorists, one must have an understanding of the "microclimate." When the organization is understood, the only method to defeat it is with "boots on the ground."

Land-based effects

The Marine air ground task force (MAGTF) is a tailorable, flexible, and responsive expeditionary force in readiness, able to operate from over the horizon in international waters without

⁸ United States Marine Corps, *U.S. Marine Corps Concepts and Programs 2005* (Headquarters Marine Corps, 2005), 5.

⁹ Jeffrey B. White, "A Different Kind of Threat: Some Thought On Irregular Warfare," *Studies in Intelligence* 39, no.5 (1996), <<http://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/96unclass/iregular.htm>>.

traditional political hindrances of host nation access. A MAGTF is scalable from the MEU(SOC) (~2,800 Marines) forward deployed embarked aboard amphibious ships provides "tailored cost effective crisis responses,"¹⁰ to a larger MEB AE (~13,100 Marines) sized MAGTF that is prepared to embark amphibious shipping on short notice.¹¹ Given the operational environment in which regional powers, characterized by "microclimates," exert more control than traditional nation states, the need for real time actionable intelligence increases.

Seabasing

Seabasing is an overarching transformational concept that provides the national command authority the option of projecting power from the sea in very short time frame (10-14 days). The core composition of the sea base is the Expeditionary Strike Force (ESF). The ESF is comprised of an **expeditionary strike group** (ESG) (amphibious assault ships with embarked MEU(SOC), surface combatant ships, and a submarine), a **CSG** and a **maritime prepositioning group** (maritime prepositioning force future (MPF(F)) ships with an embarked MEB). The sea base may also include additional maritime based assets as required.

¹⁰ United States Marine Corps, MCO 3120.9B (29 September 2001), 3.

¹¹ Matthew T. Robinson, *Integrated Amphibious Operations Update Study (DoN Lift 2+)*—A short history of the amphibious lift requirement (Center for Naval Analysis, July 2002), 25.

The key transformational capability of seabasing is arrival and assembly of troops and equipment at sea aboard the MPF(F) ships. Traditional maritime preposition ships are loaded and packed as densely as possible and require a deep draft secure port in a host nation to unload the equipment. The troops fly into the theater via strategic air lift and employ the equipment from the prepositioned ships. Off-load of the equipment from the prepositioned ships is an administrative type of operation and creates a very large logistical footprint. The logistical footprint can be thought of as an iron mountain and presents a lucrative target to the enemy. The transformational capability of arrival and assembly of troops and equipment aboard the sea base enable naval forces to conduct operations in austere parts of the world that are not accessible by traditional maritime preposition ships.

Naval Fleet Focus

Naval forces are forward deployed around the world and engaged in the Global War On Terrorism. In Afghanistan, Iraq and the Horn of Africa, Marines are on the ground fighting terrorism. Naval forces continue their mission of strategic deterrence and provide freedom of navigation in areas of U.S. interest. The Naval Transformation Roadmap provides a basis for

developing future naval capabilities in an operational environment dominated by irregular warfare.

Conclusion

The Navy-Marine Corps Team

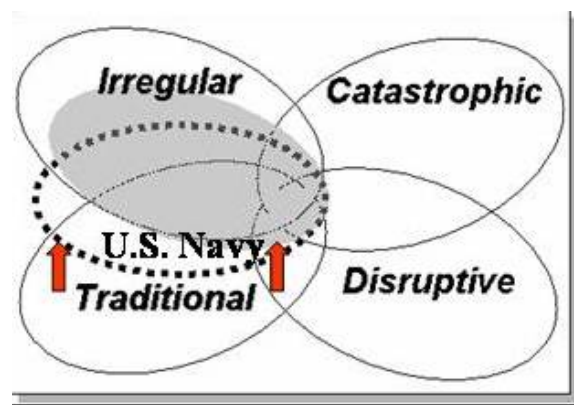
"The new direction of the Navy and Marine Corps team, both active and reserve, is to provide the nation: Naval Expeditionary Forces - Shaped for Joint Operations [and] Operating Forward From the Sea - Tailored for National Needs."¹²

The Navy-Marine Corps team is the nation's premiere expeditionary force of choice. In an era defined by uncertainty, the flexibility and readiness of the MAGTF are in higher demand than any other time in history. In order for the MAGTF to continue to be America's "911 Force," the Navy must continue to provide the strategic mobility for Marines and their equipment. The Navy provides the Marines much more than a ride to the fight. The MAGTF will rely on the use of the sea base for fire support, a logistical base of operations and maneuver. The concept of Seabasing reinforces the interdependence of the Navy-Marine Corps team.

¹² Department of the Navy, *...From The Sea*, 2.

Shifting the focus to the new reality

The future threat can be categorized in four categories traditional, irregular, disruptive, and catastrophic. The Navy is focused on the traditional threat, but should shape its forces to address the irregular threat of the future. The MAGTF has developed doctrine to fight in the operational environment of the future. The Navy continues to view the requirement for amphibious lift in a traditional sense.



The world has changed considerably since 1975. The end of the cold war in the late 1980's, and the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 have shaped national strategic strategy. Naval strategy has changed to support national strategy. However, the size of the Navy's fleet has reduced but the composition of the fleet has not. The fleet is still balanced to address a traditional military threat. The MAGTF with boots on the ground, supported by the unique capabilities of the sea base, is

the most effective method of combating the irregular threat in an area denial anti-access environment. The composition of the naval fleet is not significantly different than it was in 1975 and is still kinetic strike focused. Given this environment, there is a greater need for sea based amphibious platforms that are able to support irregular non-kinetic land influence.

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